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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 21161

LONDON FOR MILLIKEN, CENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PINS SOCI EG
SUBJECT: MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD - "JIHAD" FRICTIONS

REF: (NOTAL) CAIRO 20169

¶1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

¶2. SUMMARY: TENSIONS SIMMERING BETWEEN THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD (MB) AND A MORE EXTREME GROUP Erupted INTO A BLOODY CLASH IN ASSYUT IN LATE JULY. (THE EXTREMISTS WERE IDENTIFIED BOTH AS "AL-JIHAD" AND AS "AL-GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA", OR THE ISLAMIC GROUPING, SINGULAR.) THE INTRA-ISLAMIC VIOLENCE IN ASSYUT PROVOKED SHAME AMONG SOME ISLAMIC POLITICAL ACTIVISTS AND REVULSION AMONG THE PUBLIC AT LARGE. THE CLASH APPEARED TO BE MOSTLY A CASE OF YOUTHFUL THUGGERY, MIXED WITH A FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCE OVER THE ACCEPTABILITY OF WORKING WITHIN A NON-ISLAMIC SYSTEM TO BRING ABOUT ISLAMIC GOALS. THOUGH THE MB SUPREME GUIDE AND ONE LEADER OF THE EXTREMISTS PERSONALLY CAME TO A PEACEFUL UNDERSTANDING, THEY MANAGED BARELY TO PAPER OVER THE CONTINUING FRICTIONS, BASED ON MUTUALLY HOSTILE PERCEPTIONS: THE MB REGARD THE "JIHADISTS" AS ERRANT AND IGNORANT YOUTH AT BEST, WHILE THE LATTER CHARGE THE MB WITH COWARDICE AND "FORBIDDEN" COLLABORATION WITH THE SECULAR STATE. MEANWHILE, THE INCIDENT HAS EXPOSED AN APPARENT RIVALRY BETWEEN THE MB AND THE JIHAD FOR LEADERSHIP OF "AL-GAMA'A AL ISLAMIYA". END SUMMARY.

¶3. ACCORDING TO UNUSUALLY WELL-DONE PRESS ACCOUNTS (SEE LAST PARA), THE MB AND THE EXTREMIST "JIHAD" GROUP (OFTEN IDENTIFIED BY THE PRESS AS "AL-GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA", OF WHICH AL-JIHAD, HOWEVER, PROBABLY IS JUST ONE CONSTITUENT PART) HAD BEEN CIRCULATING LEAFLETS AGAINST EACH OTHER OVER SOME NINE MONTHS IN THE UPPER EGYPTIAN PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF ASSYUT. HANDBILLS SIGNED "AL-GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA" CHARGED THE MB ARE COWARDS, WHO USED TO ATTACK MINOR OFFICIALS, AND THEN DENIED THEIR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ATTACKS (IN CONTRAST TO THE JIHAD, WHICH STOOD UP FOR ITS ASSASSINATION OF SADAT). THEY CHARGED THAT THE MB "HATE TO SEE 'ISLAM' EMERGE, EXCEPT FROM THEIR THROATS." IT CALLED THEM "TRAINED CIRCUS LIONS" FOR ENTERING THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY, THEREBY COLLABORATING WITH A GOVERNMENT SEEN AS ISLAMICALLY ILLEGITIMATE. IN TURN, THE MB'S LEAFLETS INSULTINGLY DISMISSED AL-JIHAD", AND ITS PRETENSIONS TO LEADERSHIP OF AL-GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA, AS "LITTLE ONES. . . WHO HAS LED THEM ASTRAY?"

¶4. AT LAST MAY'S FEAST OF 'EID AL-FITR, THE PAMPHLETTEERING RACHETED UP TO A "WAR OF THE POSTERS", AS EACH SIDE PLASTERED OVER ITS RIVAL'S ANNOUNCEMENTS OF UPCOMING HOLIDAY PRAYER MEETINGS. THE POSTER WAR WAS RENEWED A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE LARGER FEAST OF THE SACRIFICE (JULY 24-25). AROUND THE SAME TIME, GANGS OF MB AND JIHADISTS REPORTEDLY USED MACHO INTIMIDATION

TECHNIQUES REMINISCENT OF WEST SIDE STORY, INCLUDING MOTORCYCLE-MOUNTED MB YOUTHS AND SWITCHBLADE-WIELDING JIHADISTS. AN MB LEADER TOLD JOURNALISTS THAT THE JIHADISTS PROVOKED THE CULMINATING RUMBLE OF JULY 23 BY CLAIMING "OUR (JIHADIST) WOMEN HAVE MORE VIRILITY THAN THEIR (MB) MEN." IN UPPER EGYPT, THOSE ARE FIGHTING WORDS THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED.

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15. ACCORDING TO THE INVESTIGATIVE PRESS REPORTS, VIOLENCE FINALLY BROKE OUT ON THE EVE OF THE FEAST OF THE SACRIFICE, AS MB YOUTHS WERE PREPARING SWEETS FOR CHILDRENS' HOLIDAY GIFTS IN THEIR MOSQUE OF SHALNAB. MORE THAN 150 YOUTHS OF THE GAMA'A SEALED OFF THE STREET, AND SHOUTED TO BYSTANDERS THAT "POLICE" INSIDE THE MOSQUE WERE PREVENTING PEOPLE FROM ENTERING TO PRAY. THEN THEY INVADED THE MOSQUE, AND OVER THE COURSE OF ABOUT 30 MINUTES DESTROYED ITS FURNITURE AND WINDOWS, KNIFING THE YOUTHS INSIDE AND BEATING THEM WITH CHAINS. 13 MB AND BYSTANDERS WERE INJURED. THE ATTACKERS FLED BEFORE POLICE ARRIVED BUT SEVEN WERE LATER ARRESTED, ACCORDING TO POLICE RECORDS REPORTED BY THE PRESS. ONE NEUTRAL BYSTANDER TOLD JOURNALISTS THAT HE HAD NEVER SEEN SUCH VIOLENCE IN HIS LIFE -- "EVEN THE JEWS AND NASSERISTS COULD NOT DO ANYTHING LIKE THIS!" THE LOCAL POLICE PASSED UP THE OPPORTUNITY TO GLOAT, TELLING REPORTERS ONLY THAT "IT IS NOT IN THE INTERESTS OF (PUBLIC) SECURITY THAT THERE BE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE MB AND THE JIHAD."

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16. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE CLASH THE MB LEADERSHIP REJECTED RECONCILIATION INITIATIVES BY "AL-GAMA'IYA AL-SHAR'IYA", WIDELY-KNOWN AS AN OFFICIALLY-REGISTERED AND ESTABLISHMENTARIAN GROUPING OF SOME 2,000 MOSQUES ENGAGED IN SOCIAL SERVICES. THE FOLLOWING WEEK, HOWEVER, DR. 'OMAR 'ABDURRAHMAN, IDENTIFIED IN THE SYMPATHETIC RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION PRESS AS "AMIR (PRINCE) OF AL-GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA," SPOKE FROM SAUDI ARABIA BY PHONE WITH MB SUPREME GUIDE ABUL NASR. ACCORDING TO THE "SPOKESMAN" OF THE GAMA'A, DR. 'ALA' MOHI AL-DIN, 'ABDURRAHMAN ORDERED THE GROUP TO SHOW "SELF DISCIPLINE". OTHER LEADING RADICAL RELIGIOUS FIGURES, INCLUDING ALEXANDRIA'S AHMED AL-MEHALLAWI, ALSO INTERVENED. THE STAGE WAS THUS SET FOR THE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF RECONCILIATION AT THE MOSQUE OF AL-GAMA'IYA AL-SHAR'IYA IN ASSYUT AUGUST 5. (DESPITE ITS REPORTED ROLE IN THE MB-JIHAD RECONCILIATION, HOWEVER, THE NATIONAL LEADER OF AL-GAMA'IYA AL-SHAR'IYA, TOLD US THAT HIS GROUP HAS NO CONNECTION, PERSONAL OR OFFICIAL, WITH EITHER THE MB OR THE GAMA'A.)

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17. SINCE THEN, WESTERN JOURNALISTS WHO INTERVIEWED JIHAD/GAMA'A MEMBERS INVOLVED IN THE AIN SHAMS INCIDENT IN CAIRO OF AUGUST 12-13, TOLD US THAT THE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE MB AND RADICALS CLEARLY REMAIN. THE HEART OF THE ISSUE SEEMS TO BE THE MB'S RESENTMENT OF THE JIHAD'S ASSERTION OF A LEADERSHIP ROLE WITHIN WHAT APPEARS TO BE A KIND OF UMBRELLA GROUPING OF AL-GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA. THE JOURNALISTS TOLD US THE YOUTHS EVIDENTLY SOUGHT DELIBERATELY TO OBSCURE THEIR GROUP'S IDENTITY OR RELATIONSHIP WITH THAT OF THE AL-GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA. ALSO, THOUGH THE MB'S 'ESAM AL-'ARIAN CONFIRMED TO EMBOFF THAT THE MB AND JIHAD WERE RECONCILED", HE BROKE THE ISLAMICISTS' NORMALLY MAFIA-LIKE CODE OF SILENCE TO PROVIDE SOME DETAILS ABOUT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC GROUPS. (SEPARATE REPORT WILL FOLLOW AS WE SORT OUT CONFLICTING DETAILS.) AL-'ARIAN WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO EMPHASIZE THAT THE JIHAD'S CLAIM TO LEADERSHIP OF AL-GAMA'A IS BOGUS. HE BLAMED POLICE OPPRESSION OF THE JIHAD FOR TURNING THEM INTO POPULAR HEROES, WHILE THE GOVERNMENT FAILS TO DISTINGUISH THE MB FROM THE VIOLENT GROUPS.

¶8. COMMENT: THE BLOODY ASSYUT CLASH CLEARLY HAS EMBARRASSED SOME OF OUR CONTACTS AMONG ISLAMIC POLITICAL ACTIVISTS BECAUSE OF ITS UGLY AND "UN-ISLAMIC" VIOLENCE. MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE SENSE UNHAPPINESS IN ISLAMIC POLITICAL QUARTERS OVER THE INCIDENT'S EXPOSURE OF BITTER DIVISIONS IN ISLAMIC POLITICAL RANKS -- AND HENCE, SOME CLUES TO ITS SHADY ORGANIZATION. IN FACT, AL-NUR, THE SYMPATHETIC RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION PAPER THAT MOST FULLY OUTLINED THE STORY, REPORTED THAT HENCEFORTH IT WILL COMPLY WITH THE WRITTEN REQUESTS OF BOTH PARTIES TO AVOID PUBLISHING FURTHER ON THE ASSYUT INCIDENT.

¶9. MEANWHILE, THERE IS NO INDICATION YET THAT THE FORMAL MB-JIHAD RECONCILIATION HAS TAKEN DEEP ROOT, OR THAT THEIR RIVALRY WILL DEVELOP SOON INTO COOPERATION. WITH THE JIHAD LEADERSHIP AND MANY OF ITS "FEW" CADRES IN PRISON, ACCORDING TO SEVERAL SOURCES, THE MB WOULD SEEM TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND. WHAT REMAINS UNCLEAR IS THE EXACT ORGANIZATIONAL NATURE OF THE "GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA", AND THE ROLE OF THE MB AND OTHER GROUPS WITHIN IT. THE ASSYUT INCIDENT, HOWEVER, HAS SHED SOME LIGHT ON THE SHADY RELATIONSHIPS OF THESE GROUPS, AND OVER THE COMING MONTHS WE WILL BE TRYING TO EXPLOIT SOME NEW LEADS TO TRY TO MAKE SENSE OF THESE TIES.

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¶10. FOR MORE DETAILED REPORTS OF THE ASSYUT INCIDENT, WE CALL ANALYSTS' ATTENTION TO CENTER-LEFTIST, SECULARIST ESTABLISHMENT WEEKLY "ROSE EL-YUSUF" OF AUGUST 22 AND MODERATE ISLAMIC OPPOSITION WEEKLY "AL-NUR" OF AUGUST 3 AND AUGUST 10. AL-NUR INVESTIGATIVE ARTICLES ARE STARTLINGLY UNUSUAL AS EGYPTIAN JOURNALISM, STRIVING FOR OBJECTIVITY BY NAMING SOURCES AND DESCRIBING THE INCIDENT FROM THE DIFFERING VIEWPOINTS OF THE MB, JIHAD, POLICE, AND INNOCENT BYSTANDERS. ARTICLES PROVIDE MB AND JIHAD/GAMA'A LOGOS FROM THEIR PAMPHLETS, AND PUBLISH PHOTOS AND NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS AND MOSQUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE VARIOUS ISLAMIC GROUPS IN ASSYUT.

WISNER